

Q 2012 -- 17/18



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Monday, February 13, 2012

7:30 p.m. Walter Hall

Edward Johnson Building

80 Queen's Park

2011-12 SEASON

ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

Geoff Nuttall, violin
Scott St. John, violin
Lesley Robertson, viola
Christopher Costanza, cello

PROGRAM

Quartet in D minor, Op. 76 No. 2 ('Fifths')

Joseph Haydn

1732-1809

Allegro

Andante o più tosto allegretto

Menuetto: Allegro ma non troppo

Finale: Vivace assai

String Quartet No. 5

Bohuslav Martinů

1890-1959

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Allegro vivo

Lento. Allegro

INTERMISSION

Quartet in A flat, Op. 105, B. 193

Antonín Dvořák

1841-1904

Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro appassionato

Molto vivace

Lento e molto cantabile

Allegro non tanto

4 + Haydn Fugue Op. 20

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The Men's and Women's washrooms in the basement are currently undergoing renovations and are out of service. Patrons are advised to use the washrooms on the main floor and second floor. We apologize for the inconvenience caused.

Program Notes

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

Quartet in D minor, Op.76 No.2 (Hob.III:76) ('Fifths') (1797)

In Germany, this quartet has the nickname *Die Quinten (Fifths)*, referring to the two descending intervals of a fifth with which the piece opens. This falling interval and its inversion and different permutations recur throughout the first movement; it will provide a unifying element in the melodic material of the entire quartet. Haydn would have called this his 'learned' (*gelehrter*) style. And it is a measure of his genius as a composer that we do not need to pick apart the technical sophistication of his musical language to enjoy its content. The craft in Haydn's music appealed to the younger Mozart and he learned much from it. With the D minor tonality of this quartet, however, we also find Haydn taking a leaf out of the book of a composer more than 20 years his junior. D minor was Mozart's 'tragic' key – the key of the powerful Quartet K. 421 that Mozart had recently dedicated to Haydn. In his Op.76 No.2, Haydn returns the compliment with one of the most concentrated, rigorously constructed quartets he ever wrote.

The highly focused, impassioned mood of the first movement relaxes in the following Andante. Here, the first violin serenades us, to alternating plucked and bowed accompaniment, in elegant music that is not without a hint of whimsy – the pleasing, relaxed theme has the unusual length of 15 measures. The minuet then brings complete contrast. Its severe style introduces a strict canon, first between the two violins, then between viola and cello. Its bleak and eerie minor mood, plus the tension Haydn develops within the music, have given the movement a nickname of its own – *Hexenmenuett*

('Witches' Minuet'). The tension between major and minor keys continues in the exuberant finale with its 'Hungarian' off-beat inflections, frequent pauses to hold the listener's attention and extreme leaps – with a surprise in store on the final leaps. The tension is only resolved towards the end when, suddenly, the music eases quietly into the major key and remains there right up to the jubilant final chords.

For the 18th century English historian Charles Burney, Haydn's Op. 76 collection, written when the composer had already been writing quartets for a half century, was "full of invention, fire, good taste, and new effects and seem the production, not of a sublime genius, who has written so much and so well already, but of one of highly-cultivated talents, who had expended none of his fire before." Haydn's music is concentrated and closely argued. It speaks out to an audience and ranges boldly through different keys. The music both sums up the great classical era of chamber music and looks ahead to the dawning age of romanticism.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ (1890-1959) String Quartet No. 5 (1938)

With more than 400 compositions to his name, many of them unpublished, Martinů is a difficult composer to pigeon-hole. His music is written for almost every conceivable combination of instruments and always reveals a strong feeling for technical polish and craft. Throughout his life, he remained isolated from the mainstream and his isolation seems to be symbolized by his birthplace. Born in the small Bohemian town of Polička, Martinů spent much of the first 12 years of his life in a church tower at the top of 193 steps. He was to feel isolation through much

of his life. After unproductive studies at the Prague Conservatory and five years playing among the second fiddles of the Czech Philharmonic, he began a life of exile, first in Paris, later in the United States, unwilling to return to Polička once his homeland became occupied shortly before the outset of World War Two.

Polička did give the young Martinů some proficiency on the violin and a life-long love of chamber music. "I feel right at home with the quartet, intimate, happy," Martinů said in 1946. He began composition of an early string quartet at 10, by which time he was leading the town's string quartet. He completed several others before his official First Quartet in 1918. Of his seven mature quartets, No. 5 from May 1938 is widely regarded as the finest. Like the quartet *Intimate Letters* that Janáček wrote a decade earlier, Martinů's Fifth springs from a love affair and the accompanying intensity of expression. By 1938, now coming to the end of a 17 year period in Paris, Martinů was married to Charlotte Quennehen, a Paris dressmaker who worked long hours to support her husband's composition. He, however, was head over heels in love with his student Vítězslava Kaprálová, a gifted Moravian composer and conductor, 25 years younger. The two Czech musicians shared a language and a love of their homeland. "Wherever she went, she brought spring with her," Martinů wrote later. "She was a true Moravian girl: persistent and endearing, kind and energetic."

Martinů's last three string quartets all acknowledge women in his life. No. 6 centres around Rosalie Barstow with whom he had a ten-year relationship. No. 7 is dedicated to his wife. Martinů withheld the original score of No. 5 for two decades, in part because of the political turbulence of the times

and in part because it contains what his biographer, Brian Large, refers to as "whimsical cartoons" and "intimate marginalia recording a series of events, personal thoughts and incidents resulting from a difference of opinion or quarrel [Martinů] had had with Kaprálová and from her sudden departure to Monte Carlo." While the published score (which was only issued after the première of the work May 25, 1958) does not include these intimate details, the entire score is coloured by the affair. "Its contents are tragic, uncompromising and harsh to the point of aggressiveness," Large concludes. "It is a work demanding much of listener and the performer alike."

The powerful opening movement contrasts two easily distinguishable themes in a free sonata form structure, the first vigorous and turbulent, the second ecstatic, soaring high in the strings. The music is in the fundamentally neo-classical manner in which Martinů found a distinctive musical voice after working his way through many of the "isms" that vibrated through the avant-garde in Paris. By the end, it settles on an uneasy G minor, the key that underpins the entire quartet. The intensity continues in the tragic Adagio, punctuated by a recurring ominous figure already previewed early in the opening movement. This brooding slow movement draws musical material from a song titled *The Farewell Handkerchief* that Kaprálová wrote in 1937. The third movement is a bitter, even sardonic Scherzo that is driven unrelentingly forward. The slow introduction to the finale appears to offer some consolation as it meditates on themes heard earlier. By the end of this fastidiously crafted, deeply felt quartet, however, the mood remains melancholy, tragic and unresolved.

ANTONIN DVORÁK (1841-1904)
Quartet in A flat, Op. 105, B. 193 (1895)

Chamber music was an important part of Dvořák's composition, totalling more than 30 works. His Op. 1 was a string quintet, with two violas. His first string quartet followed in 1862 when he was 21. His last quartet, his fourteenth and the work to be heard today, was written 33 years later. Although the majority of his early quartets remained unpublished until long after his death, they gave him a secure grounding in the medium. As a skilled viola player, Dvořák had an insider's understanding of the potential of the string quartet. Indeed, he was one of the few late 19th century composers to write truly idiomatic quartets that don't endeavour to burst the seams of the medium. Two of his finest quartets, his last two, were composed in less than two months. But the ease and pleasure with which he created them came after a difficult period.

Behind him was a second visit to the United States. Artistically, it had been a success and he could look back with pride at the new Cello Concerto. But Dvořák had felt cut off from his friends and relatives. He had been isolated from the Bohemian countryside and from the life that provided inspiration for his creativity. He returned to Bohemia in late April, 1895. Once back in familiar surroundings, he fell back into the old routine that he had missed. He started the day with an early morning stroll in the Karlsplatz Park and resumed teaching at the Prague Conservatory. He checked up on the comings and goings of the railway trains he loved to watch. He had regular evening meetings with younger musicians and actors in Mahulík's restaurant. For

the next six months, however, the ink ran dry. Then the creative block began to disappear. Before long, Dvořák was able to write: "I work so easily and everything goes ahead so well that I could not wish it better." His two late string quartets can be viewed as a summing up of all that he found good in the world. They are an affirmation of life and nature and reveal total mastery of the medium.

Dvořák had sketched the opening of the first movement of the A flat quartet, Op. 105 in his last week in New York, but then laid it aside. The yearning, second part of its main theme bears a striking similarity to the heroine's theme in Janáček's *Kreutzer Sonata* Quartet. But, after an initial hint of foreboding, the mood is generally positive and full of well-being. Dark clouds hovering over the opening do not altogether disappear. The scherzo is a *furiant*, a Bohemian folk dance, exuberantly propelled, with a trio section full of lilting, soaring melodies. The melodies draw from Dvořák's nationalist musical language, but somehow transcend time and place in one of the composer's most satisfying chamber music movements. Then comes a heartfelt slow movement, musing dreamily on a folksong-like melody. Its ending introduces a note of unease into an otherwise untroubled musical discourse. The finale starts cautiously and appears at first reluctant to abandon itself to unbridled joy. But Dvořák's happiness at being home seems to win through. The music is rich in musical ideas, sometimes nostalgic, more often upbeat and, ultimately, unambiguous in expression.

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Biography

The St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has established itself among the world-class chamber ensembles of its generation. Its mission: bring every piece of music to the audience in vivid color, with pronounced communication and teamwork, and great respect to the composer. Since winning both the Banff International String Quartet Competition and Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1992, the quartet has delighted audiences with its spontaneous, passionate, and dynamic performances. Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* magazine writes, "the St. Lawrence are remarkable not simply for the quality of their music making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection."

Whether playing Haydn or premiering a new work, the SLSQ has a rare ability to bring audiences to rapt attention. They reveal surprising nuances in familiar repertoire and illuminate the works of some of today's most celebrated composers, often all in the course of one evening. John Adams was inspired to write works expressly for the quartet after hearing them in concert. His "String Quartet," written for the SLSQ, was premiered by the quartet in January 2009.

In spring 2011, the quartet will premiere a new work by Osvaldo Golijov, also composed for them. This forthcoming work (co-commissioned by Stanford Lively Arts and Carnegie Hall) is expected to build on the success of their previous collaboration, which culminated in the twice-Grammy-nominated SLSQ recording of the composer's *Yiddishbbuk* (EMI) in 2002.

SLSQ maintains a busy touring schedule. The 2010/11 season includes two trips to Europe with concerts in Germany, Belgium, Italy, Finland and Estonia. In North America, SLSQ returns to Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, New York and Philadelphia in addition to concerts in North Carolina, Georgia,

Oregon, Idaho, Arizona, Florida, Alabama, Texas and Oklahoma. During the summer season SLSQ is proud to continue its long association with the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, SC and Bay Chamber Concerts in Rockport, Maine.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the quartet's founding in Canada, SLSQ in 2009 commissioned five Canadian composers and performed their work across the country. They also have active working relationships with numerous other composers, including R. Murray Schafer, Christos Hatzis, Ezequiel Viñao, Jonathan Berger, Ka Nin Chan, Roberto Sierra, and Mark Applebaum.

Since 1998 the SLSQ has held the position of Ensemble in Residence at Stanford University. This residency includes working with music students as well as extensive collaborations with other faculty and departments using music to explore a myriad of topics. Recent collaborations have involved the School of Medicine, School of Education, and the Law School. In addition to their appointment at Stanford, the SLSQ are visiting artists at the University of Toronto. The foursome's passion for opening up musical arenas to players and listeners alike is evident in their annual summer chamber music seminar at Stanford and their many forays into the depths of musical meaning with preeminent music educator Robert Kapilow.

Violist Lesley Robertson is a founding member of the group, and hails from Edmonton Alberta. Cellist Christopher Costanza is from Utica, NY and joined the quartet in 2003. Violinists Geoff Nuttall and Scott St. John both grew up in London Ontario; Geoff is a founding member and Scott joined in 2006. Depending on concert repertoire, the two alternate the role of first violin. All four members of the quartet live and teach at Stanford, in the Bay Area of California.



Simon Bolivar String Quartet

Alejandro Carreño, Boris Suárez, violins | Ismel Campos, viola | Aimon Mata, cello

Revised Program

HAYDN: String Quartet Op 74 No. 1

GINASTERA: String Quartet No.1

SCHUBERT: String Quartet No. 14 in D minor "Death & the Maiden"

Created from within the National System of Youth and Children Symphony Orchestras of Venezuela (El Sistema) the quartet is composed of musicians of the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela. Along with the orchestra, the Simón Bolívar String Quartet has played at various venues within Venezuela as well as in South, Central and North America, Europe and Asia, performing in concerts as well as taking part in educational events. They have worked with and been heard by such musical personalities as: José Antonio Abreu, Gustavo Dudamel, Claudio Abbado and Sir Simon Rattle.

Monday, March 26, 2012. 7:30 pm. Walter Hall

Tickets: \$40 (\$30 senior/student). Call 416-408-0208 or visit the Weston Family Box Office at the TELUS Centre, 273 Bloor St. West.

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